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Summary record of the 36th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Bródi ..... (Hungary)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Ms. McLurg

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 118: Programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 (*continued*)

Information and communications technology, disaster recovery and business continuity for the United Nations: arrangements for the secondary data centre at Headquarters — revised estimates relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 under Section 28D and Section 36 (A/63/743 and A/63/774)

1. **Mr. Choi** Soon-hong (Chief Information Technology Officer), introducing the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/743), said that the Secretariat relied on a wide range of information and communications technology (ICT) systems to support its own activities; to ensure coordination with the Member States, agencies in the United Nations system and other stakeholders; to make its operations transparent to the public at large and to discuss the programmes of committees and other bodies. Consequently, unavailability of any core ICT system would have a tremendous impact on the strategic and operational activities of the Organization, paralysing its global operations.

2. During the main part of its sixty-third session, the General Assembly had discussed, but discounted on the grounds of escalation of construction cost estimates, the proposal of the Secretary-General to site a secondary data centre at the United Nations Federal Credit Union building in Long Island City. That proposal had outlined the urgent need for a facility to replace the existing unreliable secondary data centre in the United Nations Development Corporation (DC2) building. A new centre was required to mitigate the risk of disruption of ICT services during the relocation of the primary data centre to the new North Lawn building as part of the capital master plan project and to maintain long-term stability of ICT support for the Organization's operations.

3. The report before the Committee described problems associated with the DC2 data centre's inadequate electrical and cooling capacities and lack of emergency generator power. Since the summer of 2008, several core ICT systems had been repeatedly shut down to reduce overheating. The DC2 building's electrical infrastructure was near its maximum capacity, making it difficult to manage the power and cooling situation effectively. Those constraints prevented the DC2 data centre from being used as a primary data centre while production systems migrated to the North Lawn building, an exercise which would significantly increase the already high risks associated with the DC2 facility, which the members of the Committee were invited to tour in order to witness first hand the deteriorating situation.

4. The new secondary data centre must be fully operational by the end of October 2009 to avoid disrupting the capital master plan schedule. As it was unfeasible to construct a new data centre by then, the proposed solution was to lease and equip a "data-centre-ready" commercial facility that already had the necessary raised floors, power, cooling, emergency backup power and other infrastructure. Such facilities were available in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut area and could be leased for varying amounts of time with options to increase or decrease capacity as necessary. The proposal also provided for the International Computing Centre to furnish the necessary ICT equipment and to manage the leased data centre.

5. The possibility of extended data-centre outages disrupting or even paralysing the global operations of the Organization during the General Assembly's sixty-fourth session, even though difficult to imagine, should be addressed before it was too late. The Secretary-General's proposal could reduce the risks associated with moving the primary data centre during the capital master plan.

6. **Ms. McLurg** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/63/774), recalled the Secretary-General's warning of the risks to the schedule and cost of the capital master plan if the challenging timetable indicated in his new data centre proposal was not met. In the view of the Advisory Committee, the planning and overall management of the data centre project had been deficient, and the new data centre proposal did not appear to provide the assurance requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/262 that risks would be sufficiently mitigated.

7. Having been aware for some time of the need for a secondary data centre and of the constraints of the capital master plan, the Secretariat could have been

more proactive, preventing delays by anticipating potential problems, preparing for a variety of contingencies and allowing time to develop cost-effective alternatives and robust, technically sound solutions. The Advisory Committee would have found it easier to consider the Secretary-General's proposal if it had included more complete costing information, such as an analysis of likely costs over the lifespan of the data centre project and a comparison of the costs of the equipment leasing and acquisition options.

8. Despite its misgivings, the Advisory Committee recognized that a reliable secondary data centre was a critically important factor in the schedule of the capital master plan, and that disruptions in the provision of some ICT services could have an adverse impact on the operations of the entire Organization. In the light of the time pressure involved, it found that it had no alternative but to recommend approval of the proposal. However, the continued deficiencies in the planning and management of the project must be remedied if implementation was to be successful, and the migration strategy should be re-examined to explore the possibility of savings.

9. The Secretary-General should be requested to ensure effective leadership and management of the project, to define roles and responsibilities clearly, to monitor progress against performance targets rigorously, to take rapid corrective action if problems emerged and to establish mechanisms to hold individuals accountable for their areas of responsibility. The Advisory Committee also recommended requesting the Secretary-General to enlist the services of an independent expert with substantial technical experience in the field of migration and relocation of data centres to validate the project implementation plan and to advise the implementation team.

10. While not objecting to the proposed cost-sharing arrangement for the new data centre, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to re-examine the approach for dividing costs between the regular and peacekeeping budgets and to consider applying a common cost-sharing arrangement between peacekeeping and non-peacekeeping operations across the Organization.

11. Lastly, the Advisory Committee wished to point out the effect of the stringent time constraints on the submission of its report for the consideration of the Fifth Committee. The availability of the report of the Secretary-General had determined the timing of the Advisory Committee's work, which had begun in the first week of March 2009. As the Secretary-General's proposal had many implications and required detailed scrutiny, the Advisory Committee had found itself requesting substantial additional information. It had also concluded that visits to the existing primary and secondary data centres would be beneficial to its deliberations.

12. Following receipt of the last instalment of additional information, on the morning of 18 March 2009, the Advisory Committee had finalized its report and submitted it for processing on the same day. As the Fifth Committee was aware, the time pressure on the Advisory Committee was intensified by its need to work in parallel on a number of reports regarding matters for which information had arrived late in the first part of the resumed sixty-third session.

13. **Mr. Abdelmannan** (Sudan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that investment in ICT was crucial to the conduct of the Organization's global operations and to promoting better efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and accountability. The Organization must also be able to respond effectively to emergencies that might impair critical elements of its ICT infrastructure.

14. The Group recalled that the Secretariat's original proposal to site a secondary data centre in the United Nations Federal Credit Union building in Long Island City had been withdrawn, but not before resources had been wasted through the signing of a 10-year lease. It was a matter of concern that the Secretary-General's current proposal presented some of the same problems as its predecessor. The Organization was obliged to make a strategic decision on a proposal for substantial investment without sufficient analysis or information. The Group was unconvinced that the new proposal was the most cost-effective or workable, or even that it could be implemented in accordance with the suggested timetable.

15. The new proposal failed to respond to the request of the General Assembly to consolidate systems in central data centres and to prioritize systems in order to minimize the cost of disaster recovery and business continuity. The Group was disappointed that the Secretariat had yet to classify critical and non-critical

systems, enabling a clear ranking of those which must be backed up in the secondary data centre. The proposal also carried excessive risks associated with the number of relocations and overall cost, as it might mobilize staff who otherwise might be employed in implementing long-term ICT strategy, in projects such as the introduction of enterprise resource planning. The Group was concerned that the proposal did not envisage the necessary measures to ensure the security and confidentiality of the Organization's data, particularly in view of the intention to use an external commercial data centre.

16. The Group agreed with the Advisory Committee that there were continuing deficiencies in the planning and management of the project, and that it appeared to be based on an improvised reaction to situations as they arose rather than being the result of anticipation of potential issues and consideration of strategic, long-term requirements. The Group remained unconvinced that the project delays were due partly to the need to re-evaluate the secondary data centre strategy in the light of General Assembly resolution 63/262, believing rather that they were the result of lack of planning, coordination and proper compliance with established rules and regulations. That had been demonstrated clearly by the disastrous handling of the Long Island City data centre project, which had been funded through a commitment authority that had been neither examined nor approved by the Fifth Committee. Accordingly, the Group would seek clarification of all the relevant issues.

17. **Mr. Plunkett** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that the Organization could not be modern, efficient and effective without suitable information and communications technology, as the General Assembly had wisely recognized in December 2008 in approving the introduction of a new ICT strategy and the implementation of a new enterprise resource planning system.

18. The situation following the withdrawal of the Secretary-General's original proposal for a secondary data centre was a cause for concern because of the impending relocation of the primary data centre to the North Lawn building, the likelihood of cost escalation and the risk to data and ICT services. While Australia, Canada and New Zealand would have preferred to see a unified disaster recovery and business continuity plan, they welcomed the new proposal, agreeing that the first priority must be a viable solution for the secondary data centre.

19. Although committed to providing the Secretariat with the resources needed for disaster recovery and business continuity, they must be convinced that all opportunities for consolidation and prioritization had been exhausted, and that the request for additional resources could withstand critical analysis. Moreover, as concerns regarding the timeline of the project remained, the three delegations wished to be reassured that the proposed course of action would not interrupt the schedule of the capital master plan.

20. **Mr. Gürber** (Switzerland) said that his delegation would have preferred the Committee's decision regarding the arrangements for a secondary data centre to have been a difficult one, involving a choice of more than one valid option. Instead, the decision would be an easy one, with no room for choice. His delegation had little to add to the bleak observations of the Advisory Committee. The Fifth Committee had too few details of the new proposal for a secondary data centre, was unsure whether it would have the desired outcome and lacked the time to consider it in depth. However, no sound, cost-effective and feasible counter-proposal was available.

21. Recognizing the danger of disregarding the importance of ICT security and business continuity, his delegation believed that to reject the new proposal would be to penalize those who relied on the Organization's capacity to fulfil its mandates in a reliable and uninterrupted manner, particularly in the field. In the absence of an alternative, his delegation favoured discussion of the proposed leasing of a commercial data centre facility, with a view to understanding it better and seeking to optimize it, particularly from the standpoint of cost-effectiveness.

22. **Mr. Ronaghan** (United States of America) said that the Organization must have uninterrupted ICT facilities and a fully operational data-backup system to mitigate the risk of losing vital services and critical information. His delegation remained concerned that the setbacks which the Secretariat had faced in connection with setting up a secondary data centre reflected a lack of sound contingency planning. It would like the Secretariat to explain what steps had been taken to remedy the situation and to provide assurances that the Secretary-General's proposal was

the best and most cost-effective alternative and was able to provide sufficient risk mitigation.

23. His delegation trusted that the Secretariat would better anticipate future needs, not only in the case of the current project but also in the case of all components of the ICT strategy launched by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/262. While recognizing that failure to take a decision on the secondary data centre would affect the execution of the capital master plan, he regretted having to contemplate such a decision without additional analysis, but believed that the views of the Advisory Committee were an appropriate basis for discussion of the matter. The Secretariat should keep in mind the current difficult economic circumstances, the rapidly escalating expenditure under the regular and peacekeeping budgets and the consequent need to use the resources provided by the Member States in an efficient, effective and transparent manner.

Other matters

24. **Mr. Abdelmannan** (Sudan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that his Group wished to reiterate its long-standing view that documents should be issued on time in all six official languages. While the Group was concerned at the endemic problem of late availability of documentation, it wished to distance itself from the unwarranted attack directed at the Advisory Committee and its Chairman when certain delegations had spoken on that matter at the Committee's 35th meeting. Blaming the Advisory Committee for the situation did not match the objective facts. In 2008, recognizing the steep increase in the Advisory Committee's workload, the Fifth Committee had recommended a two-week extension of the Advisory Committee sessions. The Group commended the Advisory Committee for the quality of its reports, the exceptional guidance it provided for the Fifth Committee's decision-making process despite facing many obstacles, including its limited scope for internal burden-sharing.

25. The Chairman of the Advisory Committee did not have the ability to delegate responsibility freely to the body's Vice-Chairman, who was not remunerated for occupying that post or for sharing the workload of the Chairman. It was bizarre to blame the Advisory Committee for the Organization's systemic challenges, which included inability to submit documents to the Advisory Committee on time. Those who had criticised the Advisory Committee had neither the will nor the desire to improve its conditions of service. Such improvement was urgently needed. The Group invited its partners to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.